(c) if so, the States where such pockets prevail; and

(d) what steps Government have taken to end this codial evil?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (DR. SATYA NARAYAN JATIYA): (a) As many as 2.31 lakh freed bonded labourers have been rehabilitated so far.

(b) and (c) As per the survey conducted in October—December, 1996 by State Governments, about 29,000 bonded labourers have been identified in Seven States namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

(d) Under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, the respondibility for identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers rests with the concerned State Governments. As per the direction of Hon'ble Supreme Court, the National Human Rights Commission has also been involved to supervise and review the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. The State Governments are regularly advised to keep a watch on the emergence of bonded labour through vigilance committees constituted at District and Sub-Divisional levels and take stern action against those persons who are found keeping workers under bondage. They are also advised from time to time to take steps for the rehabilitation of the released bonded labourers.

Rationalisation of Wages and Service Conditions of Beedi Workers

2413. SHRI SATISH CHANDRA SITARAM PRADHAN: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that rationalisation of wages and service conditions of Bidi workers is pending for a long time?

(b) the action Government propose to take for resolving their demands;

(c) whether it is a fact that due to non-provision of safety equipments by the factory owners, large number of workers have suffered respiratory diseases and have died due to inhailing of tobacco;

(d) whether Government have made it mandatory for Bidi Manufacturers to cover Bidi Workers under Compulsory Health Insurance Scheme; and

(e) if not, whether Government will make adequate amendment in the law and grant relief to the workers?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (DR. SATYA NARAYAN JATIYA): (a) and (b) Wages of beedi workers are notified by the State Governments under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. These wages are also revised from time to time by them. The Regional Labour Ministers' Conferences for Eastern, Southern, Northern and Central regions in 1994-95 recommended that there should be a degree of uniformity in minimum wages among all States and the quantum of variation should not be more than Rs. 3/-. It was, therefore, recommended that while reviewing basic rate of wages, each State should take into account the rates of wages prevailing in adjouning States to avoid shifting of industry. The wages should also be linked with CPI and VDA should also be revised every six months. Payment in lieu of Bonus, leave with wages, National and Festival holidays should also be taken into account. The State Governments have been advised accordingly.

(c) The provision of safety equipments in factories where beedis are manufactured is covered by the Factories Act, 1948 and consequential incidences of respiratory ailments due to non-provision of such equipments are monitored by the State Governments.

(d) and (e) The Labour Welfare Organisation of Ministry of Labour maintains 208 dispensaries and 3 hospitals under the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act exclusively for the health care of beedi workers and their dependents. Financial assistance is also given to beedi workers for treatment of cancer, heart diseases, kidney transplant, mental dis-

eases, leprosy and T.B. In addition, a Group Insurance Scheme has also been introduced for providing financial support in case of death to the dependents of beedi workers.

निजी क्षेत्र में विकलांगों के लिए आरक्षण

2414. **श्री जनेश्वर मिश्र:** क्या सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या यह सच है कि "विकलांग दिवस" पर राष्ट्रीय विकलांग सम्मेलन में वक्ताओं ने मांग की है कि सरकार को विकलांगों के लिए निजी क्षेत्र में भी आरक्षण की व्यवस्था करके उनके साथ न्याय करना चाहिए; और

(ख) यदि हां, तो इस संबंध में सरकार का क्या रवैया है?

सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्रालय की राज्य मंत्री (श्रीमती मेनका गांधी): (क) सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्रालय को इस संबंध में कोई सूचना नहीं मिली है।

(ख) प्रश्न नहीं उठता।

Rehabilitation of Widows in Vrindavan

2415. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMA CHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the approximate number of widows living in Vrindavan for their livelihood;

(b) the measures proposed to look into their welfare in old ages; and

(c) the steps proposed to grant them maintenance allowance or pension for their livelihood or to rehabilitate them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be placed on the Table of the House.

Cabinet Committee for Social Justice and Empowerment

2416. CHAUDHARY CHUNNILAL: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) when was the Cabinet Committee for Social Justice and Empowerment constituted;

(b) whether meetings of this Committee have been held regularly; and

(c) if so, how many meetings have been held; if not, what are the reasons for conspicuous irregularity having been committed in respect of such an important matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): (a) No Cabinet Committee with the nomenclature "Cabinet Committee for Social Justice and Empowerment" has been constituted.

(b) and (c) Question do not arise.

Identification of senior citizen

2417. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI: SHRI PARAG CHALIHA:

Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the cut off age for a person to be identified as a senior citizen/elderly person;

(b) the population of elder persons in India as on 1st January, 1998; and

(c) the details of steps taken/being taken to provide social security, medical, journeys and other facilities vis-a-vis International year to the elderly people?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): (a) It may not be practical to prescribe a uniform age beyond which persons are treated as older persons. Government officials retire at